

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

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Abstract

India is a developing and predominately agrarian economy. 70% of its population is rural, of those households, 60% engage in agriculture as their main source of income. Agriculture is an engine of growth and poverty reduction in developing countries where it is the main occupation of poor. Many women, in developing countries, are major producers of food. Nearly 63% of all economically active men are engaged in agriculture as compared to 78% of women. It is observed that women play a significant role in agricultural development and allied activities including main crop production, live-stock production, horticulture, post-harvesting operations etc. About 70% of farm work is performed by women. Women farmers do not have equal access to productive resources and this significantly limits their potential in enhancing productivity. The present paper shows that the contribution of women in agriculture is extremely significant. It also throws light on the obstacles faced by them in terms of less access to productive resources which do not recognized her work as active productive member.

Keywords: Problems, Objectives, Role of women. Gender differences, Challenges etc.

INTRODUCTION

The international development community has recognized that agriculture is an engine of growth and poverty reduction in countries where it is the main occupation of the poor. But the agricultural sector in many developing countries is underperforming, in part because women, who represent a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy through their roles as farmers, labourers and entrepreneurs, almost everywhere face more severe constraints than men in access to productive resources. Efforts by national governments and the international community to achieve their goals for agricultural development, economic growth and food security will be strengthened and accelerated if they build on the contributions that women make and take steps to alleviate these constraints.

Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as "economically active employment" in national accounts but they are essential to the wellbeing of rural households. This paper contributes to the gender debate in agriculture by assessing the empirical evidence in three areas that has received much attention in the literature:

- How much of the agricultural labour in the developing world is performed by women?
- What are the obstacles faced by women in agree sectors?
- Do women face discrimination in agree sectors?

CONTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURE IN WORLD'S, INDIA'S AND GUJARAT'S ECONOMY

Agriculture is known as a fundamental instrument for sustainable development and it helps in poverty reduction as it is the main source of food, income and employment for the rural population of the world. Therefore, we can say that agriculture plays a crucial role in the economy of developing countries. As per the Food and Agriculture Organization (2000), the share of the agricultural population in the total populace is 67%. Agriculture accounts for 39.4% of the GDP and 43% of all exports consist of agricultural goods.

India is mainly agricultural country and agriculture plays a vital role in India's economy. As per the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, over 58% of the rural households depend on agriculture as their principal means of livelihood. Agriculture, along with fisheries and forestry, is one of the largest contributors to the GDP. India is the largest producer, consumer and exporter of spices and spice products. For most of the Indian families, agriculture is the most important occupation. As per the data of year 2015, agriculture contributes about 16% to the total GDP and about 14.7% of the total export earnings.

Gujarat is a diversified agricultural economy. Agriculture and allied sector plays an important role in the economy of the state. Though its contribution in Net State Development Product (NSDP) has gradually declined from around 50 percent during 1970s to around 21.6 percent in 2010-11, agriculture still considered as a

backbone of the state economy because more than half of the working population in the state is still dependent on agricultural activities for their livelihood

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problems of women in agriculture are more acute and distressing manner. When addressed in a women-centric manner, the potential for increased productivity, restoration of ecological balance, for high positive social impacts like increased status, self-confidence and food security for communities which all are increased much more tangibly than working in a gender-neutral manner. The problems relate to land ownership, security of tenure, land quality issues in cases where land ownership is assured, and finally, land management issues in agriculture and the support systems are required.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on only secondary data which were collected from books, journals, government reports, websites and NSSO data.

MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. To find out the role of women in agriculture and its allied fields.
2. To analyze the gender differences in roles and activities in agriculture sector.
3. To Examine the main challenges faced by female farmers in agriculture sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a vast body of literature linked with role of rural women in agriculture and its allied fields, but here we mention only recent work being done on the topic.

Nisha N (2008).study brings out that the labourers got maximum number of days of employment in weeding followed by harvesting and postharvest operations. The woman labour had maximum unemployed days in summer as this is the off season for agriculture in the study area which compelled the woman labourers to seek employment opportunities like NREGS activities, construction work, tile making etc. The study also concluded that woman unemployment in agriculture has caused a severe impact on the income of labourers, family expenditures, and their saving and debt position. It also caused migration of labourers to other activities and places. Increase workforce participation rates do not always indicates increase in the level of welfare. So it must be accompanied by higher educational capabilities and asset and income.

V. Vetrivel, R. Manigandan (2013) in “An empirical study of agricultural labour in India” states that almost half of the world’s agricultural workforce comprises of women. They are contributing from production to sale as well as preparation of food. Though traditionally role of women worker in agricultural was under-estimated. Women are working as paid labour or unpaid family member in agriculture in developing countries but they are still facing gender inequalities .

Swamikannan and Jeyalakshmi (2015) study about women labour in Indian agricultural sector and found that female work participation rate has declined drastically during last few decades, which shows that female workers are moved from agricultural to non-agricultural activities because wage differences between male and female workers for the same type of work discourages female workers.

So, all the above studies show that females are largely employed in agricultural sector and their share in agriculture is crucial.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including the main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post harvest operations, agro/ social forestry, fisheries, etc. It is a fact long taken for granted but also long ignored. The nature and extent of women's involvement in agriculture, no doubt varies greatly from region to region. Even within a region, their involvement varies widely among different ecological sub-zones, farming systems, castes, classes and stages in the family cycle.

Participation rate of women in agricultural sector

Total Population of India	1210.85 million
Rural Population	833.7 millian
Urban Population	377.1 million
Work Participation Rate	39.8 %
Percentage of female cultivators to total workers	24%
Percentage of female agricultural labourers to total workers	41.1%

(Source: Census of India 2011)

As per the census 2011, Gujarat's population is 6.04 crore with 3.15 crore males and 2.89 crore females. The total number of workers in Gujarat is 247.68 lakh and the work participation rate is 41 percent, which is higher than the national average of 39.8 percent. About 70.5 percent of total workers are rural based. Out of 247.7 lakh total workers, 203.7 lakh are main workers and the remaining 44 lakh are marginal workers, which consists of 39.3 lakh (89.3 percent) worked for 3 to 6 months and 4.7 lakh (10.7 percent) worked for less than 3 months in the state. During the year 2001, there were about 58.03 lakh of cultivators in the state, constituting about 27.3 percent of total workers. Among the total cultivators, about 32.7 percent (19 lakh) were women and 51.4 percent of total agricultural labourers were women.

THE GENDER DIFFERENCES IN ROLES AND ACTIVITIES IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR

Another issue is the problem-ridden conceptualization of women's and men's work in rural environments, in particular, the failure (by census-takers and researchers who are not gender-aware, for example) to recognize the importance of their differing roles. Analysis of the gender division of labour has revealed that women typically take on three types of roles in terms of the paid and unpaid labour they undertake. These three roles can be described as follows:-

The productive role: this refers to market production and home/subsistence production undertaken by women which generates an income.

The reproductive role: this refers to the child-bearing and child-rearing responsibilities borne by women (which are essential to the reproduction of the workforce).

The community management role: this refers to activities undertaken by women to ensure the provision of resources at the community level, as an extension of their reproductive role. An understanding of these three roles can inform gender-aware planning that takes into account the differential impact of programmes and projects on women and men because of women's triple role. When under-estimations and under-valuations of rural women's work are found, as they so often are, in the sphere of development planning, the consequences are serious. Failure to acknowledge the importance of women's multiple contributions to rural survival means that practical policy interventions are frequently detrimental both to women themselves and to their communities.

Another factor that needs to be taken into account is that certain tasks, activities or enterprises may be regarded as „male“ or „female“. For example, women typically gather forest products for fuel, food for the family, fodder for livestock and medicinal uses. Men more often cut wood to sell or use as building materials. In order to secure sustainable and equitable management of forest resources, therefore, both women and men need to be consulted in the design and implementation of forestry projects. Similarly, where livestock is concerned, women and men often own different animal species and use different animal products, and any policies or programmes would need to address the needs of both.

Women agricultural workers, although they represent a big proportion of all women workers, continue to receive lower wages than men. The Ministry of labour puts the difference at 60 per cent of men's wages, while the Indian Labour journal showed that women received 75 per cent of men earnings.

Average Wage Earning Received per day by casual labours by sex in Agriculture Sector

Type of Operation	Female	Male
(a) Manual Work in Cultivation	38.06	48.14
Ploughing	27.91	39.09
Sowing	32.73	41.81
Transplanting	28.37	38.78
Weeding	29.22	39.15
Harvesting	25.74	34.68
Other Cultivation activities	29.24	39.21
(b) Manual Work in other	27.65	39.27
Agricultural	30.65	44.84
Activities	33.34	46.45
Forestry	41.30	61.59
Plantation	21.88	28.14
Animal Husbandry	55.73	57.74
Fisheries	27.96	42.64
Other Agriculture activities	27.34	42.31
(c) Non-Manual work in cultivation	34.98	56.49
(d) Non manual work in activities other than Cultivation.	29.01	44.84

These changes also coincide with the period of the 1990s, when India really began to part of a globalize economy. Some of the changes that have ensured the huge displacement of labour from agriculture are given below:-

A shift from subsistence farming to marketable crops - irrespective of regions, changes in crop patterns showed a common trend, all the shifts resulted in a decrease in the labour required.

Greater use of labour- displacing machinery.

A change in land use patterns-from agriculture to urban, industrial areas or brick kilns and in coastal areas to export-oriented aquaculture. All the new activities displace labour from agriculture but create fewer jobs than they destroy.

MAIN CHALLENGES FACED BY FEMALE FARMERS IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR

1. Women have unequal land rights. They hardly enjoy land ownership rights directly in their names. Limited rights or access to arable land further limits livelihood options and exacerbates financial strain on women, especially in women- headed households.
2. Women have limited access to use of productive resources.
3. Women perform all un-mechanized agricultural tasks and perform multiple tasks which add more burden to them due to lack of equipment and appropriate technology.
4. Women have little control over decision making process, either inside home or outside home. Without access to capital or household decision making abilities women lack the resources that are for their labor stability and stability of their household.
5. Few women holding of agricultural productive resources such as land, animals and machinery.
6. Poor women farmers are less able to purchase technology to adapt to climate change due to lack of access to credit and agricultural services. They often have low productivity due to an inability to invest in things such as improved seeds and soil replenishment.
7. Women farmers in agricultural sector suffer from high illiteracy rate among them. They do not know their legal rights.
8. Women earn fewer wage, especially in joint, informal and private sector.
9. Miss applying some laws and regulations in favor of women such heritage legislation.
10. Lack of market intelligence and inadequate information put women farmers under unfavourable situation with weak bargaining power with the buyers.

CONCLUSION

Women have been contributing enormously to agricultural growth and development through their involvement in crop production, horticulture, animal husbandry, fisheries, natural resource management etc. Though the proportion of women workers in agriculture has declined, yet they constitute a significant workforce in agriculture. Globally, they constitute large percent of economically active population in agriculture. Region-wise figures show that agriculture supports a very high proportion of economically active women, particularly in Asia and Africa and in India. Women's contribution varies across regions, socio-cultural and agro-production systems. On the other hand, the persisting gender gap in access to and control of resources remains an important concern which has not only kept women in a vicious circle of low productivity but also has thrown up questions about inclusive and sustainable growth of the sector. The need of the hour is on how to bridge the gender gap and empower women with new knowledge and technology is a great challenge, particularly in the context of socio-economic and climate related changes.

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